

Nehru and the Communists

Towards the Constitution making

Amrit Varsha

Independence (1947) marked a sharp break with the past in the sense that the colonial power got replaced by peoples' elected representatives and subject people became citizens having dreams, demands and aspirations. During the struggle for independence those guided by the desire to forge the strongest anti-imperialist front were the nationalists. Within the movement they underplayed their differences in the interest of unity. However, once the goal of independence was achieved, the urgency for unity against imperialist forces and consensus was soon replaced by competition. Those who had earlier foregone their differences for larger interests and goals, began to carve distinct and independent entities for themselves. This process became more clearly defined with the extension of franchise and electoral competition after the Constitution of India came into force in 1950. Independence thus marked the change from nationalist politics to competitive power politics.

The phase towards the making of the constitution was instrumental in evolving new relationships among those participating in competitive politics and carving out new identities. In this context the interaction between Nehru and the Indian communists was significant as the debates that followed though ideologically sound were politically fragile. The role of the communists was enigmatic and remained so towards the competitive politics that emerged after the constitution came into force in 1950.

This paper therefore examines how Nehru legitimized the twin goals of national unity and parliamentary democracy through the constitutional framework to put India on the way to modernization and laid the nationalist road to socialism. In the process to persuade people to accept his objectives he drew scathing criticism of the communists that turned to be the pretext to their relationship with Nehru in the post 1947 era. The paper is split into two parts. The first deals with the communist criticism of the composition, character and working of the Assembly and defines the whole exercise a result of the compromise and collaboration with the British imperialists. The second part examines the communist deliberations on

the proposed provisions of the constitution. The inner contradictions are deeply embedded in their analysis and get exposed as they reject the constitution yet decide to participate in competitive politics that followed.

I

It is important to recall that with the change in the line of the communists during the second world war (1941) by deciding to follow the soviet line and support the British, and not the Quit India movement launched by Congress, they chartered a course that was bound to bring them into conflict with the Congress, the national movement and its leaders. This was evident more with the parting of the ways in 1942 and got reconfirmed with their ouster from the Congress, in 1945. It is equally important to recall that “Nehru’s corpus of texts and political action provide an endless chain of interpretations and reinterpretations. Several styles or types of discourse seek to reincarnate a figure known as Jawaharlal Nehru and each seeks to appropriate Nehru for distinct ideological ends. One may wish to recall Nehru as he was in pristine purity. But as he himself was so fond of saying, life moves on in ceaseless change; in the flux of history, which is also unceasing interpretation, no identities with fixed, eternal essences may be located.”¹

The cooperation and confrontation between Nehru and the Indian communists was thus guided as much by their ideological preferences as by tactical considerations. Nehru, with all his leanings towards socialism, was above all a nationalist. Saddled with the added responsibilities, it was natural for him to give primacy to the unity and integrity of India and propose a strong centre to protect India against foreign attacks. He drew upon parliamentary democracy and advocated universal adult suffrage, free and fair elections, independent judiciary and press, civil liberties and constitutional guarantees to govern such a vast country. The communists on the other hand were guided more by their ideological preferences to appropriate Soviet or Chinese model of communism. The mutual reactions help to review the conflict through an interface of the two broader ideologies of nationalism and communism. To examine how communists began to ground themselves in Indian politics in post-1947 one can see it in their reaction in the immediate context of the constitution making and their attitude towards Nehru.

It is important to point out that Nehru was visualizing independent India when the communists guided by the Comintern were following an ultra-leftist strategy

¹Upendra Baxi, “The Recovery of Fire: Nehru and Legitimization of Power in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.25, no.2, January 13, 1990, pp. 107–112.

and vehemently criticised the nationalists as bourgeoisie. Since early 1930's Nehru was consistently proposing a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of the adult suffrage to draw up a constitution for India. He believed this to be the only democratic way to give effect to the wishes of the people, bring economic issues to the forefront and solve the communal problem. He expected it to be a real representative body of the masses with power to decide and give effect to its decisions. He advocated full representation of masses because that would not bring the economic issues to the forefront but help recede communal issues into the background by rendering them unimportant. He expected this to help solve the Indian problems in terms of economic reality.²

It is pertinent to say that the communists were significant by their absence in this Constituent Assembly for the constitution making.³ Somnath Lahiri represented the communist view so long he remained its member till July 1947. There was no other communist representative in the Assembly.⁴ They reacted not from within the Assembly but from outside and were considerably active and verbal in expressing their views, a practice that turned to be their *modus operandi* later in Indian politics. The Communist Party was the only political group outside the Assembly which decried the constitution.

The initial differences of the communists with Nehru from the beginning of the Assembly made it difficult for them to cooperate with him in the making of the constitution. Their distinctive approach and attitude further widened the existing differences that had surfaced during the war period. Differences among communists in their attitude towards Nehru were more evident since 1943 as some distinguished Nehru from the congress. The paper is thus an account in order of sequence to explore their reactions in the process to frame the constitution.

Nehru's decision to accept the Cabinet Mission's plan for the Assembly and to participate in its deliberations did not tantamount to acceptance of the plan as a whole. It only implied their acceptance to enter the Assembly to give it a fair trial. Nehru was firm to abandon the Assembly if it could not serve their purpose. He emphasised on the need to examine and reach decisions with the perspective of

²Jawaharlal Nehru, "A Constituent Assembly for India", Lausanne February 25, 1936. *Jawaharlal Nehru Papers*, Vol.II, pp.55-56, NMML.

³Somnath Lahiri (Bengal) P. Sundarayya (Andhra) were proposed as candidates but Lahiri was the only elected member till July 1947. For our study therefore we rely on his participation and the communist view outside the Assembly helps us in imparting valuable information regarding the communist attitude.

⁴CPI put up 108 candidates for 1585 seats and won 8 in provincial Legislative elections (1946). They managed to win 3 out of 3 seats in Bengal.

achieving their ultimate objective of complete independence. His priorities were evident when he pleaded to examine everything in the context of Indian independence. The proposed Assembly, according to Nehru, was constituted to frame the constitution for a free and independent India based on democracy and complete sovereignty of the people of a republican State according to their standards and in the light of their own interpretation.

The communists on the other hand opposed the Cabinet Mission's plan to utilize the newly elected (1946) Provincial Legislative Assemblies as the Electoral College for the future Constituent Assembly because they viewed the proposal with a different perception of their broad understanding of India as the home of distinct nationalities.⁵ They demanded a constitution making body on the principle of universal adult suffrage and sovereign constituent assemblies for each 'national area' and demanded that the delegates to the constitution making body be elected by these sovereign constituent assemblies.⁶ They strongly objected to the participation of the princes and hence, opposed the Constituent Assembly's decision (December 1946) to appoint a committee to confer with the Negotiating committee that was set up by the Chamber of Princes. They opposed the official resolution because they did not want the 'princes or their stooges' to participate in the Assembly.⁷

The communists disapproved the Congress' acceptance of the plan for the Constituent Assembly because they regarded the Assembly a creation of the British meant to lead India into a new partnership with the British imperialism. Hence, they expected no freedom of action within the Assembly because it drew its powers from the British. They abhorred Congress decision as a big compromise with the imperialists and characterized the Assembly as unfettered but not free.⁸ Nor did they accept it as a sovereign body since the plan did not recognize the Indian Independence. With such perception of the Assembly, with so many limitations, communists anticipated a slave constitution based on Hindu-Muslim disunity and princely autocracy.⁹ They refuted the Congress' claim that the Assembly represented all interests and

⁵The Communist Party in a resolution in September 1942 declared India to be the home of many nationalities and each distinct nationality was given the right to a sovereign or autonomous state within the Indian federation or union with the right to secede if it so desired. Andhras, Karnatakis, Marathis and Bengalis were some of the examples of distinct nationalities. See G.Adhikari, *Pakistan and National Unity*, Bombay, 1944, p.8.

⁶P.C. Joshi's statement, Bombay, October 12, 1945, *The Indian Annual Register*, July–December 1945, Vol.II, p.121.

⁷A.S.R. Chari opposed the resolution, New Delhi, December 12, 1946, See, *People's Age*, December 29, 1946, Vol. V (26), p.12.

⁸P.C. Joshi's statement, December 9, 1946. *People's Age*, December 15, 1946, vol.v (24), p.1.

⁹G. Adhikari 'week in Review', *People's Age*, August 18, 1946, Vol. V(7), p.5.

maintained that it represented the Congress, *zamindars*, industrialists, traditional liberals and communal Hindus.¹⁰ The communists also characterized the Assembly as undemocratic because the members were elected on the basis of indirect elections, by provincial assemblies, which represented only 13% of the people.¹¹

When the Assembly was constituted (1946) Nehru realized that it was not elected on universal adult franchise but he did not reject it simply because it was not in accordance with certain principles, rules or notions he had advocated in the past. He anticipated both its positive and negative aspects that could turn it either to be a useless body or a powerful instrument for achievement of freedom. Instead of rejecting it at the outset he agreed to test it on the touchstone or the existing facts and desired objectives. He decided to rely more on the way they handled the Assembly and made its working a success.

Nehru expected the Assembly to function as a free body because he was least threatened by any possible interference of the British Government. Although the Assembly was a British creation yet he was confident that the British would have nothing to do with it once the Assembly began its work. He repeatedly ruled out any solution that was drawn up by the British and was unwillingly imposed. He was confident that the acceptance of a certain procedure in advance could neither prevent nor limit their absolute freedom to determine their own course in the Assembly. He firmly believed that Indian constitution could be determined by her own people without outside interference.¹²

Nehru had no qualms about the proportionate strength of the people in the Assembly and he regarded the Assembly a sovereign body since it had no foreign in it and no outside authority could interfere with its decisions. He was least perturbed that no weightage was accorded to certain communities whom the British imperialists had pleased for their own benefit. He was against separate representation for each group and community and stressed on the need to curb such tendencies instead of encouraging them.¹³ He rather envisaged a constitution that was able to cement the loose fabric of India and connect diverse religious, linguistic ethnic and racial groups. In this regard Nehru's stand was contrary to that of the communists

¹⁰Ranesh Chandra, "Who's among India's Constituent Assembly Candidates", *People's Age*, July 21, 1946, Vol.v(3), p.4.

¹¹Communist Party Memorandum to the Cabinet Mission', April 15, 1946, *Marxist Miscellany*, Vol.I (15), p.23.

¹²Nehru to the Editor, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1945), J.N. Papers, Vol.XIX (1289) NMML (no date).

¹³Nehru indicated his views on separate electorates when Anbian, President All India Kshatriya Nadir Association, asked for the representation of Nadir community. Nehru to Prof. A.J. Anbin, August 25, 1946, J.N. Papers, Vol.iii (183) NMML.

who saw India as the home of distinct nationalities. The communists proposed representation of all national units on linguistic and cultural bases.¹⁴

It was surprising that in spite of the strong criticism leveled against the origin, composition and aims of the Constituent Assembly the communist decision to contest the elections to the Assembly. Not only this, they even regretted that the Congress High Command was not able to spare even one seat for them while it had included 'old liberals, chauvinists, Mahasabhaitees, big landlords and arch profiteers in their list'.

In defense of their decision to contest, Communists argued that it was a part of their strategy to carry on the battle inside and outside the Assembly to expose British designs. They viewed that the boycott of the constitution making body would have meant playing the British game. Because they perceived the Assembly as a manoeuvre to smash the growing upsurge, split the freedom movement and perpetuate imperialist rule in a new form, they decided to use the Assembly as a forum to expose the imperialist designs.¹⁵

They severely condemned the role of the Congress leaders who constituted the bulk of the Assembly representatives and dubbed them as the allies of the British imperialism, the representatives of the capitalists and the vested interests. In the Congress dominance they saw the dominance of the bourgeois upper class whom they labeled as 'past masters in the art of demagoguery, in the art of cheating people'.¹⁶ They complained that the Congress representatives had made lavish promises to the Indian people before they came to power. After coming into power they put a loud pretence of adherence to democratic principles but repudiated every one of them in practice. The Communist attempt to distinguish Nehru from his other colleagues in the Congress and the Assembly was explicit when they argued that though Nehru led liberal elements of various shades in the assembly it was inevitable that the ultimate result would be a compromise between right and left groups of the Congress. What was implicit and what perhaps communists failed to realize were the inner contradictions within their own party.

With this broad perception of the Assembly it is not difficult to understand why the communists defined it as 'the ill begotten conceived out of sight and behind the back of toiling masses born as a result of the betrayal by the bourgeois Congress

¹⁴For further reference see f.n. no.18.

¹⁵The communists argument that their intention to contest the elections was to capture power and to break the constitution from within. See statements by E.M.S. Nambudirpad and A.K. Gopalan, *Indian Express*, July 9, 1969. Also see Editorial, "Communist Party and Constituent Assembly", *People's Age*, July 21, 1946, Vol.v(3), p.5.

¹⁶*Crossroads*, December 23, 1949, Vol.I (16), p.16.

leadership, enacted in 1946 when they crossed over and entered into alliance with imperialists.’¹⁷

The communists exposed the weaknesses of the Assembly on the basis of the differences among the members of the Assembly. Little did they realize that they themselves could not be absolved of the same charge explicit in their attempt to distinguish Nehru from his other colleagues. It is not out of place to argue that Nehru, too, was not unmindful of the differences among the members but stressed on the need to carry on the proceedings to preserve national stability. But since Nehru and the communists failed to reconcile on the broad framework of the constitution, disagreements and differences were apt to follow.

II

With dissatisfaction over the composition and character of the Assembly, it is not surprising that the communists attacked the draft constitution as well. In their opinion speeches of the members were dull, long worded and mock debates that underlined not only the antipeople and anti-democratic character of the regime but demonstrated the intentions of the Congress leaders to impose a steel frame constitution as an effective instrument to safeguard the Fascist rule. Long drawn debates on the provisions¹⁸ of the constitution were seen as a Congress conspiracy to protect the country’s landlord capitalist interests.

The communists regarded the preamble of the constitution unrepresentative of the people because it failed to represent the aspirations of the workers and the peasants. They rather defined it be a masterpiece of hypocrisy and saw in it a real deal of surrender to imperialism that was hidden from the masses. They challenged the sovereign character of the Republic for being at the same time a member of the Commonwealth, which recognised the king of England as the titular head which to them meant a frank acceptance of imperialist policies and subordinate position. Nehru was severely condemned in this regard and they saw a complete subservience of his Government to the British thereby becoming the main agency through which war and national enslavement were being foisted on the people of India. Hence according to the communists under standing instead of embodying the sovereignty of the Indian nation the Constitution enslaved it to the British imperialists.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Crossroads*, December 16, 1949, Vol.I (15), p.2.

¹⁸ Communists differed primarily on the preamble, the ‘objective resolution’, the federal scheme, the minorities, the fundamental rights and the directive principles.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

The communists opposed and reacted strongly to Nehru's 'Objective Resolution'.²⁰ While Nehru, with the support of the majority in the Assembly, conceptualized the resolution for making India a sovereign democratic republic, ensuring a broad based progressive development to aid its peaceful and historical advance towards a socialist future the communists tabled an amendment that was ruled out of order. They feared that even if the resolution dealt with the establishment of an independent sovereign republic it did nothing more than show how it could be achieved.

The communists opposed the constitutional federal scheme also because the provinces were not given residuary powers and there was no right of secession to linguistic and cultural national units.²¹ Nehru's framework envisaged a strong centre possessing residuary powers and capable of ensuring peace, coordinating vital matters of common concern and able to speak effectively for the whole country in the international sphere. The communists criticized the federal provisions and wanted linguistic and cultural national units which would have the unfettered right of self-determination to decide freely whether they wanted to join the Indian Union or form a separate sovereign state.²² Obviously Nehru's framework was guided by his nationalist urge whereas the communists which in theory gave cultural and linguistic minorities the right to secession. As a nationalist Nehru viewed the position in terms of India's unity whereas the communists viewed it in terms of their theory.

They condemned Congress leadership for not properly dealing with the problem of minorities.²³ They supported the decision of the Assembly to liquidate all imperial privileges and weightage but at the same time proposed statutory reservation for minorities according to their population. They underlined the absolute necessity of reservation in services for the period of transition and did not consider mere presence of an adequate share consistent with efficiency sufficient and expected much more from the Congress leadership.²⁴

The communists keenly observed the debates on the interim report on the Fundamental Rights, and criticised many of its features. The Fundamental Rights and

²⁰Nehru did not like the term 'Objective Resolution'. He found it a prosaic description because the Resolution embodied more than mere objectives.

²¹Somnath Lahiri tabled an amendment. See *People's Age*, December 29, 1946, Vol.v(26), p.3.

²²"Communist Resolution for Constituent Assembly: Declaration of Independence", *People's Age*, December 15, 1946, Vol.v(24), p.1. The Central Committee of the CPI, Bombay, adopted the resolution to be introduced by Lahiri.

²³A.S.R. Chari, "Review of Constituent Assembly's Discussions on Minority Rights. Justice to Minorities: Bed Rock of a Strong Democratic State", *People's Age*, September 7, 1947, Vol.vi (10), p.5.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp.5,10.

the Directive Principles of State Policy were designed by the Assembly to bring about the great reforms of the social revolution. K.M. Panikkar considered both the Rights and the Principles as source and inspiration for reform legislation. He stated, “under their aegis the Indian Parliament has been active in the matter of social legislation, whether it be called by the Hindu code or by another name”.²⁵ The communists visualised a dismal picture with the rights reflecting the policeman’s point of view instead of a free India. They opposed provisions that empowered the Government to ban meetings, processions and demonstrations. They wanted to curtail the wide powers of bureaucracy and the police because to them these rendered Fundamental Rights illusory. They argued that the constitution ruthlessly limited and destroyed the liberties of the people in relation to freedom of speech, organization and the press, etc. They advocated free press from the control of a handful of monopolists.

They regarded democratic principles embodied in the constitution to be a mere pretence because of the restrictions and the safeguards which to them had practically denied and limited them. The constitution in their view had buried the Fundamental Rights because the state owned little responsibility in ensuring these rights. The Fundamental Rights were further weakened because the right to work, leisure, equal pay and education were relegated to the Directive Principles which were not enforceable by any court. The State had no obligation to implement these principles nor could the people demand their fulfilment.²⁶

Fundamental Rights guaranteed, in communist view, the unrestricted freedom for exploitation. They apprehended that freedom of speech, people’s liberties and press was so much circumscribed to be the weapons for oppressing the people. They also regretted that while these rights were negated by their limitations, the other important rights like the right to picket, the right to strike and the right to bear arms were not mentioned. They explained absence of these rights as its aim to suppress the rising power of the people. Provisions regarding the arrest and imprisonment of citizens were considered as outrageous and hypocritical part of the constitution.

Communists failed to view constitution as an instrument to change and rebuild society for the common welfare of the people. Austin, however, underlined that “Fundamental Rights of other constitutions might have served as well as — or even better than — those of the Indian constitution in protecting the existing rights and liberties of the people. Indian Constitution has provided so much impetus towards changing and rebuilding society for the common good.”²⁷

²⁵K.M. Panikkar, *Hindu Society at the Crossroads*, Bombay, 1955, p.52.

²⁶“Fundamental Rights Buried by New Constitution”, *Crossroads*, December 13, 1949, Vol.I (16), p. 16.

²⁷Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford, 1966, p.3.

Because of the Congress dominance in the constituent Assembly and the class character of the Congress, the communists seriously doubted the basic objective of the Constitution to eradicate social evils. They believed that the social oppressions would not be removed because the Congress leaders were 'tyrant caste ridden Hindus and enemies of the untouchables.' They rather suspected that the educational and economic backwardness of the untouchables would increase under the constitution.²⁸

The communists widely differed from Nehru on the compensation clause in article 31 providing that compensation must be paid for all property for public purposes. Legislature could prescribe different principles for the payment of property acquired for different purposes. While Nehru strongly supported and recommended the provisions, the communists thoroughly condemned it, because in their view the Article guaranteed the property and the privileges of the vested interests against the mass of toilers. In retrospect it may, however, be argued that the communists were on a solid ground in criticizing the compensation clause in Article 31. While Nehru was trying to convince himself that Parliament being supreme, the constitution would not stand in the way of social reforms particularly land reforms, the communists criticised the provisions of article 31 on the ground that they would stand in the way of land reforms. In the light of the above it is not difficult to discern why the communists defined the constitution 'a bourgeois constitution'. They viewed it as a product of conspiracy of Indian capitalists through their Congress representatives who 'sold away the freedom of the country by striking a deal with British imperialism through the Cabinet Mission and Mountbatten Plan to jointly rule over the people in the interest of the Indo-British capitalist classes'. The whole process was seen as a plot against the working class and the Indian people because it denied the fundamental rights of the working class and the toilers and was meant for the upper class to rule the oppressed millions.

Western dominance irritated the communists as they realized that apart from the British dominance America also influenced the Indian system. The Americans were called the new masters and the Nehru Government had become subservient to the imperialists and taken India into the Anglo-American camp. Good profits were ensured to foreign capitalists at the cost of the working class and people's movement. It was charged that under their dictates the Nehru Government had fallen into their trap to convert India into a war base. Instead of confiscating the industries and assets owned by Indian and foreign profiteers the foreign vested interests were promised complete freedom to subjugate India. Imposition of enormous taxes on the people

²⁸"Manifesto of CC of the CPI on New Constitution", *Crossroads*, January 13, 1950, Vol.I(19), p.3.

had also benefited their interests. This evidently embodied in the constitution, ‘the rule of the Indian capitalists, landlords and the princes working in cooperation with the imperialists.’²⁹ Little did the communists realize they too were blamed for their loyalty towards the Soviet bloc.

A clear indication of the influence of the 1936 Soviet constitution in their critical approach was visible. The communists condemned the Indian constitution for its failure to ensure economic equality emphasizing that the economic foundation of the U.S.S.R. was based on the socialist system of economy characterized by the public ownership of the means of production.³⁰ They built their argument on the contention that if equality was not considered in the means of production (social ownership of the means of production) it was a deceptive equality.

They quoted Stalin to criticise the Fundamental Rights and the accompanying safeguards.³¹ The communists believed that the democratic principles were merely a pretence because the restrictions and safeguards practically denied their benefits to the masses. In regard to the state responsibility to ensure the rights they found the Indian constitution to be weaker in comparison to the soviet constitution because the right to work was ensured by the socialist organization of the national economy. To the communists the difference between a democratic people’s constitution and the constitution of a bourgeois state that upheld a social order for the benefit of a few and the exploitation of many millions, was too obvious.

Apart from the ideological consideration that guided the communists assessment of the Indian constitution in the light of the Soviet constitution, they were also impressed by the phenomenal progress towards socialism that the Soviet Union had made during the pre-war period under the Stalin constitution. They saw in these triumphs the complete superiority of the socialist system over the capitalist

²⁹When the Assembly was discussing the constitutional Draft, Pravda declared that the object of the constitutions was to strengthen the interests of the bourgeois and the capitalists. It was alleged that the Indian constitution had embodied the characteristics of all bourgeois constitutions; the private ownership of land, forests, factories, mills and other means of production, the exploitation of man by man, the existence of the exploiters and the exploited insecurity for the toiling majority and luxury for the idle but security for minority. J.A. Naik, *Soviet Policy Towards India*, Delhi, 1970, p.39 and “Real Character of Constitution: Surrender to Imperialism”, *Crossroads*, December 16, 1949, vol.I(15), p.2.

³⁰B.T. Ranadive, “The Indian constitution”, *Indian Left Review*, March-April, 1971, Vol.I(2), p.44.

³¹*Crossroads*, December 23, 1949, vol.ii(16), p.16. “From the standpoint of democrats bourgeois Constitutions may be divided into two groups. One Group of constitutions openly denies or actually nullifies the equality of rights of citizens and Democratic liberties. The other group is of constitutions which readily accept and even advertise democratic principles but at the same time make reservations and provide for restrictions which utterly mutilate these democratic rights and liberties.

system, the superiority of Stalin's policies over all other policies. And the policies of the Anglo-Americans (whose philosophy had inspired the Indian constitution) in their drive for world domination spelt national enslavement of the people and oppression at the hands of the capitalist monopolies.

In their campaign against the constitution they tried to expose it as an instrument of class domination in contrast to the provisions of the Soviet constitution. They denounced the constitution as a product of war mongers, a conspiracy hatched against the Soviet Union and China', because it was framed by the Nehru Government that was considered to be in the war mongers' camp through its membership of the British commonwealth.³² Hence they opposed the constitution and called upon the people to organise strikes, processions and demonstrations against it.³³ Nehru saw these demonstrations as political provocation for disrupting the administration something which was not acceptable to him. The differences between them widened further.

In the debates of the Assembly the communists saw a struggle between two opposing forces — democracy and authoritarianism — waged by mass of the people on the one hand and a handful of vested interests on the other.³⁴ They did observe that Nehru led the liberal elements and they distinguished Nehru from Patel and the rightists in the Assembly. Nehru was considered to be the leader of the former trend supporting the mass of the people while Patel guided the interests of the handful of vested group.³⁵ But they did not cooperate with Nehru because the compromise between the two factions was unacceptable to them.

It is interesting to note that both Nehru and the communists were aware of the differences among members of the Assembly. Nehru did not press his views too far least they should go against national interests and unity and he regarded differences to be a healthy sign of awareness among the members. He stressed on the need to achieve the objectives in unanimity and cooperation because he wanted to maintain the unity of the nation, an idea that had dominated the Congress throughout the struggle for freedom. The need to assimilate varying views to maintain broader principles of Indian anomalies guided Nehru's approach to constitution making. Moreover, Nehru was also the Prime Minister, and had the responsibility of steering the country through the most difficult and trying period's of Indian history. Differences on constitutional provinces could threaten party unity and weaken the

³² *Crossroads*, January 13, 1950, *op. cit.*, p.3.

³³ *Crossroads*, December 16, 1949, *op. cit.*, p.3.

³⁴ "On the Campaign Against the New Constitution", P.B. Circular No. 1/50, January 3, 1950.

³⁵ A.S.R. Chari, "How Governors Got Special Powers in the Constitution, *People's Age*, August 31, 1947, vol.vi(9), p.5.

government. Compromise was thus inherent in the logic of the situation.

Such compromises on vital issue of the provisions of the constitution were, however, not acceptable to the communists. They were thus unable and unwilling to cooperate with Nehru. In this context they not only differed with but differed even among themselves. Some of them even challenged the right of the assembly to frame a constitution,³⁶ whereas Nehru was ready to compromise, because the assembly and not British Parliament was to frame the constitution. Both the communists and Nehru were convinced that the assembly was a non-revolutionary body created by the British but Nehru never accepted this as a threat and was confident to carry its proceedings free from the interference of the British. The communists on the other hand could never reconcile on this issue and always apprehended the British dominance.

The phase of Nehru's relations with the Indian communists reveals the initial conflict within the broad framework of their ideological tussle. The communists were rather late in appreciating the strength of nationalism and failed to understand (the criticism of Nehru against them) that situations differ in each country. They decided to go along the constitutional way envisaged by Nehru when they could not implement their line (as tried in Telangana) not because they accepted it but because they found no alternative to political identity for which they compromised ideologically.

³⁶Jyoti Basu in West Bengal Legislative Assembly, September 1, 1948, quoted in Umakant Tiwary, *The Indian Constitution*, Allahabad, 1961, p.33; S.V. Ghate later revealed that they wanted the Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution for India; See S.V. Ghate, Transcript of Interview, Recorded on July 9, 1970, p.218, NMML.